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Human resources management

Measures to improve the balance in the geographical distribution of the staff in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides information on the measures taken in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve the geographical distribution of staff in that Office, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/236.

* A/63/150.

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I. Introduction

1. The issue of the imbalance in the geographical distribution of the staff in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been raised by the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council as a matter of concern in several resolutions adopted after 1997. This issue was addressed in reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (see A/59/65 and A/62/845), with responses from the Secretary-General issued as addenda (A/59/65/Add.1 and A/62/845/Add.1). In its resolution 61/159, the General Assembly regretted that efforts to address the imbalance regarding the regional geographical diversity of the staff of OHCHR had not resulted in a significant improvement. Subsequently, the Assembly adopted resolution 61/244, in which it requested the Secretary-General to present to it proposals to address the imbalance in the geographical distribution of the staff in that Office.

2. The Secretary-General presented his report on the measures to address the imbalance in the geographical distribution of the staff in OHCHR (A/61/823), after which the General Assembly addressed this issue in its resolution 62/236.

3. The present report is submitted in accordance with resolution 62/236, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to implement urgent measures to improve the balance in the geographical distribution in OHCHR, including through recruitment for newly established posts, and to report on the results achieved at its sixty-third session. Detailed information on the staffing situation in OHCHR is provided regularly to the Human Rights Council by the High Commissioner in her reports on the composition of the staff of the Office, the last such report being A/HRC/7/57.

II. Measures currently being implemented

4. Improving geographical diversity in OHCHR remains one of the priorities of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In line with this objective, the Office continues to vigorously implement the measures identified in the Secretary-General's report A/61/823, including the High Commissioner's procedures and framework for improving geographical diversity, as described in detail in paragraphs 17 and 18 of that report.

5. Following the national competitive recruitment examinations in human rights held in 2001 and 2005, another round of human rights examinations was held at the beginning of 2008. For those examinations the Office of Human Resources Management, in collaboration with OHCHR, invited the participation of Member States that were unrepresented or underrepresented in the Secretariat and required geographical improvement in OHCHR. A total of 49 Member States were invited to participate, and 41 of them attracted 845 applicants (there were no applicants from 8 Member States). A total of 326 candidates were invited to participate, 72.4 per cent of whom (236) sat for the examination in February 2008. An Examination Board comprising OHCHR staff with the necessary expertise is expected to complete the marking of the examinations by September 2008. It is expected that these examinations will result in a larger pool of successful candidates from Member States requiring geographical improvement in OHCHR on the roster for selection against vacant, regular budget P-2 and P-3 positions.

6. In addition to advertising vacancies through the established procedures, OHCHR continues to ensure the widest possible circulation of vacancy notices, using the mailing list of over 1,200 governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations in the area of human rights, national human rights institutions and academic institutions willing to disseminate this information. OHCHR also shares the vacancy notices with its offices in the field for wider local distribution in the countries where the offices are located.

7. These ongoing efforts are yielding positive results. Thus, from 122 selection decisions for Professional posts taken by OHCHR since the introduction of the High Commissioner's procedures and framework for improving geographical diversity, 72 decisions (60 per cent) were made in favour of candidates from regions requiring improved representation in OHCHR. On the other hand, of the 50 selections from the regions that are well represented in OHCHR, 32 were in respect of internal staff who had been transferred or promoted, thus having no net impact on the geographical balance of the Office. There has been similar progress with regard to senior posts at the P-5 and higher levels. Some 28 selection decisions have been made for senior posts since the procedures were introduced, of which 16 (58 per cent) were in favour of candidates from regions requiring improved representation in OHCHR.

8. A substantial improvement in the overall geographic diversity of OHCHR during the last 18 months can be noted. Using the methodology applied by the Joint Inspection Unit for reviewing the representation in the Office at the level of geographical groups (see A/59/65 and A/61/115), the OHCHR staffing statistics in the table below clearly show that the Office has significantly increased the percentage of staff from regions identified as requiring improved representation in OHCHR:

Staff representation in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by regional group

	31 December 2006		*30 June 2007*		*31 December 2007*		*30 June 2008*	
Region	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Africa	44	11.1	51	12.3	55	13.1	63	13.3
Asia	47	11.9	52	12.6	53	12.6	63	13.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	38	9.6	45	10.9	50	11.9	60	12.6
Eastern Europe	13	3.3	17	4.1	20	4.8	20	4.2
Western Europe and other	253	64.1	248	60.0	241	57.5	269	56.6
Total	**395**	**100**	**413**	**100**	**419**	**100**	**421**	**100**

9. While OHCHR is improving regional diversity among staff of the Office, it is important to note that the Office does not have any targets, benchmarks or methodologies mandated by legislative bodies to measure success in this respect, apart from the system of desirable ranges mandated by the General Assembly. The

composition of OHCHR does not, in this regard, differ in any meaningful manner from the composition of the Secretariat at a whole.

10. As approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/159, OHCHR has proceeded with the temporary mechanism whereby its recruitment of staff at the P-2 level is not restricted to successful candidates from the national competitive recruitment examination. With support from the Office of Human Resources Management, OHCHR has started advertising extrabudgetary P-2 positions, which are not subject to geographical distribution, through the Galaxy system. Since so far only two such posts have been put forward as they became vacant, it is too early to judge the impact of this measure.

11. In line with the General Assembly's pronouncement in its resolution 61/159, OHCHR encourages Member States sponsoring associate experts to extend their national programmes to nationals from developing countries. Similarly, OHCHR encourages Member States that are not traditionally providers of associate experts to review the possibility of their contribution to this important programme. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has reiterated this invitation in plenary meetings of the Human Rights Council. The Office has also consistently raised this issue in discussions with representatives of the Member States.

III. Conclusions and recommendation

12. The Secretary-General will continue to consider improvement of the geographical representation of staff in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as a matter of priority and support all efforts to achieve this goal.

13. **The General Assembly is invited to take note of the present report.**